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ABSTRACT

This study explores reverse discrimination as a cultural phenomenon that should be studied by anthropologists, and to which anthropology has inadvertently contributed. Discrimination by minority group members is taught and encouraged under the guise of ethnic pride and promotion of traditional beliefs. Ethnocentrism may be a cultural defense mechanism for dealing with actual or alleged hostility and abuse suffered by members of a minority group, and may be used as rationalization of thwarted aspirations. Accompanying ethnocentric attitude is discrimination against others, and in-group/out-group conflict. Cultural elitism is encouraged by religion, as a conservative/conserving institution, that reinforces traditional values and a sense of exclusivity and inclusivity. Judaism is an example of this. Cultural elitism is reflected in discrimination through language, which is almost universal. More education, cross-cultural education, or education in anthropology are often given as solutions to the problems of discriminatory behavior, but have not necessarily been successful. For education in anthropology to successfully reduce discriminatory behavior, anthropologists must examine their assumptions and concepts, and make significant changes in their approach to curriculum. (AS)

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Reverse Discrimination by Minority Groups

A Participant Observation Study

The Society for Anthropology in Community Colleges

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we argue that reverse discrimination is a cultural phenomenon and should be subject to examination by Anthropology. We find that the content, language, and methodology of Anthropology has inadvertently contributed to reverse discrimination.

Reverse discrimination is taught and encouraged under the guise of ethnic pride and promotion of traditional beliefs. The inherent discrimination against others is sometimes conscious, but is often an insidious process that has been so inculcated in minority group members that it is part and parcel of the fabric of their community and personal identity.

The descriptive and analytical terms of Anthropology, such as ethnocentrism and cultural relativity, need to be examined and rethought as to their impact on any form of prejudice and bigotry. Using illustrations from participant observation, we examine these issues. A truly holistic approach to the subject may be the key to ameliorate this unfortunate situation.

PROLOGUE

At the outset, we disclaim any ill intentions against any minority group, or for that matter, the majority. Nor do we want to be associated with the amalgamationists, who claim a society with no distinctive subgroups is the only way to eliminate intergroup conflict. There is, we contend, a middle ground in which cultural identification can be a positive thing for society and its subgroups. We seek here to discuss a phenomenon so pervasive that it negatively affects our cultural life as a society and as a world community. Our hope is to extend knowledge in order to bring about positive change.

INTRODUCTION

The original version of this paper, then entitled "The Sheenie and the Shiksa", was presented at the Midwest American Culture Association at Bowling Green State University, Fall, 1988. It was well-received by minorities in the audience who agreed with our premise. They generated many new examples which reinforced our feeling that people are afraid to discuss this issue. On the other hand, when that paper was presented to a group of senior citizens in the context of a guest faculty lecture at our community college, the audience became disturbingly polarized. The need for more discussion among professionals, policy makers, and the masses is obvious.

Rationale

Writing about discrimination by minorities or individuals who could be called minorities is difficult. First, for one of us who has been considered and considers oneself a minority group member (Jewish), it has been a rude awakening in realizing much of the pride of ethnicity was really anti-everyone else. Second, the process of studying this issue shows that the whole area has not been analyzed in a systematic way. Anthropology, as the holistic social science, has a particular responsibility in leading in this area. If the goal and process of Anthropology is meant to promote understanding among peoples, then it must set the analysis of all forms of discrimination as a top priority.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Call it what you will, discrimination by people who are members of minority, or formerly minority, groups is just as insidious and invidious as any behavior that denies the full intrinsic value and human rights of anyone.

No amount of rationalization can excuse or justify discriminatory behavior. That it is part of American culture

can be attested to from colonial history - the Puritans and the Salem witch trials, through the Revolutionary period in aspects of both the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution, the German-Irish riots of the 1840's, the "Know Nothings", the Sacco-Vanzetti trials, the Father Coughlin period, the McCarthy era, down to today in which being a "card-carrying member of the ACLU" is an epithet. The Bakke, De Funis, and contemporary cases make the issue also not simply of historical interest, but like the guy who married Louise and his tattoo said, "I love Debby", we as a society continue to either cover it up or erase it from the surface, but both the guy and Louise know it's still there.

Ethnocentrism

William Graham Sumner never guessed what the world would be like when he developed the term. He could not have known that it would become one that could be used connotatively in two opposing ways. On one hand, it is a description of a society that is so bereft of culture, as the Anthropologist uses the term that the population has no appreciation of culture, as in high culture. On the other hand, the term is an apologae for the retention of quaint folk traditions in the midst of a multi-ethnic, urbanized, post-industrialized mass society. It is often lauded as something to be admired. The denotative meaning, on the third hand, sees ethnocentrism as something "evil" that must be counteracted by the "good" of cultural relativity.

In this paper, we argue, cultural relativity may not only be a form of ethnocentrism, but absolutism in the guise of objectivity in scientism. For us, teaching in community colleges, the etic-emic approach does not help the situation. We must provide our students with an approach that will lead to understanding and not confusion. To assume that students will make the leap to really understanding actions, symbols, complexes, and institutions is in itself, intellectual pomposity.

The question as to whether this is a cross-cultural phenomenon must, we are chagrined to say, also be answered in the affirmative as attested to in the daily newspaper. Borrowing from sociology, the concept of relative deprivation and rising expectations appears relevant here. While significant changes have occurred in the U.S. and elsewhere, recent retrenchments complicate the picture. While everything is not perfect and minorities certainly should not be satisfied until full rights are achieved, often the reaction, including the demand for reparations, is counterproductive.

Other Factors

The fact is that affirmative action and its variants

became the will of the nation, albeit allegedly for only a short period of time, to redress what most perceive as historical inequities is called reverse discrimination. A legitimate national good, though, did not and does not give license to any individual, group, or organization to discriminate. Thus, political pressure and governmental policy complicate the issue.

Gordon Allport has indicated that there are basically six interrelated sets of factors to the dynamics of any intergroup relations: historical, socio-cultural, situational, personality, phenomenological, and stimulus-object. These factors have been used individually or in a sort of funnel/filters perspective. While this configuration is useful, an over-all approach that describes the phenomenon on an individual as well as group basis, though, has generally been lacking. For example, we need to understand just how individual and group competition, inherent in our system from elementary school on, contributes to discrimination. The approach taken in this paper is to look at the major institutions in terms of their contribution to the problem using the tools of ethnography and an ethnomethodological approach.

DISCUSSION

The major "theoretical concept" that became obvious in our discussions was that of ethnocentrism. The idea that a society or subgroup of a society defines its culture as superior to that of others is accepted prima facie in Anthropology and popular culture. But it has rarely been combined with other concepts to study intergroup conflict such as we are discussing. In fact, even introductory texts in the social sciences describe the "positive" aspects of ethnocentrism as "promoting unity and loyalty within the group that exhibits it". Or, "...ethnocentrism promotes stability... gives group members something to believe in and work for." The behavior of ethnocentrism seems grounded in the perceived challenge or threat from another group. The reality is there exists definable segments, or cohorts, of mass society. We segment on the basis of differences. Some of these: rust belt, sun belt, east, midwest, south and west, would appear on the surface to be rather innocuous, but by differentiating in any manner, we stratify and create an in-group/out group situation.

People who grew up in rural areas, for example, will say that they had no prejudices until they came to the city. The isolation and self-involvement of a monolithic culture such as that of a rural area or a self-contained upper middle class suburb may create even more than high visibility/high contact a proclivity to "prejudging" and stereotyping. Whether a group that has no contact and therefore no possible conflict with another would/could be ethnocentric or not is

really not addressed in the literature.

We segment ourselves and others on the basis of ethnocentric values. Other societies seem to do the same. The origin of the word barbarian and the Japanese attitudes toward the Ainu and the Koreans are classic cases. In fact, one could argue that there might be a relation between ethnocentrism toward outsiders and ethnocentrism vis-a-vis segments within one's own society. Sadly, the American Indian tribes would probably have not been decimated shortly after the arrival of the white men had they been able to put aside their ethnocentric hostilities and unite.

Discrimination as a Response

But, here, we are interested in one aspect of this complex, that is, discrimination by a designated minority group or former minority group against others. By designated minority group, we mean that which the society, on often an ad hoc basis, has labeled as a victim of discrimination by the majority either currently or in the past. Ethnocentrism in this light could be a cultural defense mechanism for dealing with the hostility and abuse either actually or allegedly suffered by members of the minority group <u>at some time</u>. The truth of the matter may be that the extent or pervasiveness of the discrimination may be significantly over-estimated and the effects of said discrimination may be totally irrelevant for the current membership, generation, or may have happened at a physical distance so far removed as to be irrelevant. Discrimination, and reverse discrimination, while very real and significant are sometimes utilized simply as rationalizations of personal or even cohort thwarted aspirations. Consider the following examples:

-One of us conducted a study in a Midwestern city the day after Martin Luther King, Jr. was murdered. A minor disturbance had broken out at a high school in the city. The further away from the location of the high school, the more people were likely to report actually hearing gun shots and hearing of injuries and deaths, none of which occurred.

-The lowering of S.A.T. scores and other admissions requirements for basketball players because black players may otherwise be discriminated against. (Unfortunately, this type of practice produces undereducated basketball players who cannot find employment when they can no longer play ball.)

-As a Jewish middle-aged male, I have suffered very few acts of discrimination and none that have significantly affected my life. However, both of us have heard many others complain bitterly that quota systems significantly impeded their opportunities or advancement, when they may simply have not met the necessary qualifications or had the ability. In response, the lack of qualifications is argued to be a function of discriminatory practices and policies.

The construction of an ethnocentric attitude, and, the discrimination against others, that comes with it, is accompanied in part by in-group/out-group conflict. Though not grounded in an economic stratification system, social hostility is often given that rationale, e.g., this group was kept out of a union or was the victim of a quota system and therefore seeks to elevate itself by asserting its superiority to the in-group that "kept us out". In and of itself that is bad enough, but what often happens is that the former out-group, once firmly ensconced in the in-group, proceeds to behave similarly to the next group that comes down the pike. Writers often excuse this behavior as a natural phenomenon, like the "kick the dog" concept. We argue that this behavior can be unlearned, and should not be excused.

Not only didn't the melting pot work because we didn't want it to, but some of our deepest felt convictions about our culture are responsible for both the little and the big hurts people cause to happen to other people every day and may even be partly responsible for the lack of movement toward solution of the international relations problems we have today.

Amalgamation and the Superculture

The purposeful burning off of the impurities of ethnicity in the melting pot did not work during the periods of heavy immigration for the same reasons it is not working in Yugoslavia, the U.S.S.R., and other places including here today. The identification with a superculture has, is, and will probably never be total. The difficulty in obtaining active pluralism without discrimination is due in large part to the self-consciousness of ethnicity. In spite of some writers' contentions that ethnicity is post-tribal, it probably has significant tribal elements, as in the self-drawing of boundaries. History is still written from a tribal perspective.

While tribe is usually seen from a political perspective, it really is an extension of the family and kin group. A listing of some characteristics of a tribe is instructive for our discussion. Leadership tends to be charismatic, descent tends to be formally unilineal, there is a high level of voluntary association membership, and there is no formal means of political succession. Economic exchange is based upon expected reciprocal sharing, the stratification system professes egalitarianism (e.g., "brothers" and "sisters"), ownership is at least partially communal, right to use force and control is reserved for the lineage, clan, or association (our emphasis), and the religious practices tend to be shamanistic with emphases on initiation rites, age grading and rites of passage that unite lineages.

As a result, a set of ideal types (read: conflict producing dichotomies) undergird the antecedents and contributing factors to discrimination by minority groups. They include: self-aggrandizement and self-depreciation; political rights of the individual and political rights of the group (one man, one vote vs. bloc voting); nativism vs. parochialism; American vs. hyphenated person; and trade unionism vs. open competition. These terms are as relevant today as they were in the past.

The internalization of the superidentity (Erikson) within the superculture (Novak) has simply not taken hold. In the process of reversing or minimally minimizing the amalgamation of Americanization (and hence the disappearance of self), each generation has sought to utilize the working patterns of ethnicity, including discriminatory action to maintain what it considers its uniqueness, its separateness, its ethic. (Ethnic and ethic are clearly related!)

In addition to the encouraged persistence of ethnicity is the sexism that continues because of sex stereotyping, feelings of "blessedness" or "chosen people" encouraged by religion, and elitism by residence. These are not separate processes, but inexorably intertwined.

Religious Justification for Discrimination

This may be the core of the issue. Generally, religion attempts to be a conservative/conserving institution. Its reinforcement of traditional values, the family and its extensions, and by and large, its sense of exclusivity and inclusivity is well documented. Fundamentalism is any guise is one recurring example. In Judaism, for example, the sense of uniqueness and superiority is narratively and legally stressed. The word kosher originally referred to making a sacrifice ritually pure and had nothing to do with the cleanliness of the food the group ate as a whole. In fact, there is reason to suppose that the "kosher food" was originally reserved for the priests and their households. The sections in the Bible on "forbidden foods" is elsewhere and may have less to do with cleanliness than with an attempt by the political leaders to forcibly separate the wanderers in the desert from Egyptian and local habits in a way not dissimilar to Peter the Great's insistence on Russian men shaving their beards off. The idea of ritual circumcision is obviously similar.

The chosen people idea is be traced back to God's commandment to Abram (trans. father of a nation; later Abraham, father of a great nation) "to go from his homeland, birth place, and family to a place where...I will make you a large people, and I will bless you, and I will make your name famous [lit., a great name] and it will be for a

blessing." The word, nation, am used later to refer to Israel after the Exodus is in sharp contrast to the word, goy, used here, which is later used to refer to non-Jews as Paul's "gentile", in a very negative sense.

We have chosen Judaism as our major example for a variety of reasons. First, our personal experience. We have spent many hours trying to understand our interactions emotionally as well as intellectually. Second, next to Blacks in the U.S., more has been made out of the continuing discrimination against Jews both in intellectual and popular writings. Third, the issues of national policy as in the guilt associated with the Holocaust, Israel as the United States'" island of democracy" in the Middle East, the Jewish lobby, high visibility of representation in the Congress, the former so-called Jewish seat on the U.S. Supreme Court, etc. Fourth, the "chosen people" aspect which American culture has internalized so completely as part of our ethos. And, fifth, the religious underpinnings of this ethnocentrism, which while apparent in other religions, is so crystal clear in Judaism in so many ways. Note, while this paper is not meant to be a condemnation of Judaism or religion in American culture, we are suggesting that some "sacred cows" [pun intended] need to be examined.

The separateness and elitism is reinforced not only through the Ten Commandments - "I am the Lord, **Your** God...you should have no other gods before me [lit. against me]...because I am...a vengeful god, who remembers the iniquities unto the third generation...but am compassionate to the thousandth to the lovers of those who love and guard my commandments" - but also through ideas such as circumcision, intermarriage prohibitions, food, dress and appearance restrictions and menstruation taboos. The intermarriage strictures are among the most severe rules in the Bible and have been interpreted down through the ages to mean that someone who "consorts" with a non-Jew is cut off from his people to the point that an Orthodox Jew even today says the prayer for the dead when one of his family marries a non-Jew.

This superiority complex, i.e., a set of interrelated symbols and behaviors that sets the group above, is reinforced by pointing to those Jews who have succeeded against all odds, i.e., discrimination, and not only bested their competition, but have stood out as the best of whatever and yet have not fallen prey to assimilation. Sandy Kofax, Bernard Baruch, Leonard Bernstein, Edgar Bronfman, and myriads of others have by some often small identification with Judaism been elevated to almost godlike status with the concomitant devaluation of non-Jews who have excelled in their own right.

This identification with cultural elitism can be seen in

the language of discrimination. Goyim, referred to earlier would include the Shabbos Goy (a non-Jew who does the work for Jews on the Sabbath, in itself against the Ten Commandments), goyishe kop (generally refers to a Jew who thinks like a goy), shiksa [lit., blemished; an unflattering term for a non-Jewish female], schmuck; an obnoxious person, similar to the expression "prick"; literally means ornament (may have more to do with Christians and uncircumcised penises than most Jews are willing to admit), or, shagis; a non-Jewish male who often seduces a Jewish woman (may be related to the Hebrew words meaning to go astray or to be a disturber).

Often this hostility is turned inward as in macher, a big shot, from the Dutch for doer which may have referred to someone who was a big shot in trade, as in the big commercial trading companies of the 17th and 18th centuries when entrepreneurship was both rewarded and distrusted. A schlemiel is a stupid oaf who can't even schlep to buy schlock among the shmatas. The examples in languages are significant, for language (thank Sapir) is the clearest method that an ethnic group has of separating itself. Ethnic humor must be understood in this context, but is a complex phenomenon and needs to be treated distinctly elsewhere. Discrimination through language is certainly not limited to Judaism, but is almost universal.

Economic/Political Explanations

With the anti-conservative bias that exists today among the pseudo-liberals, there is a tendency to project the issue of minority discrimination into a economic/political oppression framework. While some of this perspective is reflective of a utopian socialism in which it is (probably incorrectly) assumed that these practices would miraculously disappear, there is a grain of truth and it must be at least mentioned. While the Cloward and Ohlin idea is based upon some questionable premises, the truth of the matter is that minority groups and their members, even after they have achieved a measure of success, still maintain deep down in their personal and collective psyche that what has been accomplished is not only a result of super human effort (divine intercession?) against all odds but could be reversed at any time, by the society that one is not quite part of, seemingly by fiat.

Psychological Defenses

The reaction to this type of personal and ethnic stress is to develop an external oriented defense mechanism which includes discrimination against others. While this explanation may appear to be a form of psychological reductionism, the actuality is that many minorities, no matter what their current state of affluence, consider being

without a real possibility and perceive that if it were to come about, it would be the result not of luck, personal retrogression, nor general economic conditions, but rather the activities of "society" or specific identifiable groups within society against them.

Again, the Jewish example is typical. The Jew figuratively always has his bags packed. The idee fixe, "Never Again" and "Don't Forget" in relation to the Holocaust in particular is combined with a recitation of past discriminations, and generalized to any current conditions to create an attitude of being "dumped on" or "singled out". Often this defensive posture manifests itself in a way to call attention to cultural differences. When this occurs, the minority member perceives any and all attention as prejudice. Rather than examining one's personal behavior, he often retaliates. It is interesting to note that many "assimilated" minority groups contribute to an atmosphere of adversity by accentuating and characaturizing seeming minor eccentricities, as in the example of the Jewish American Princess. One would think that one would be wary of using JAP, particularly for this group only one generation from WWII. But, people don't always act in their best self interest as witnessed by the fact that it was the Governor of Massachusetts who initiated the term, "card carrying member of the ACLU" himself.

Intergroup vs. Intragroup Solidarity

It is interesting to note in this context the short lived Jewish-Black coalition of the Civil Rights Movement. As long as philanthropy and intelligentsia could appear to control the course of events, the Jewish community supported the Black Rights movement, but as soon as the Black community said, "We want to do it ourselves, our own way," Jewish support not only waned, but the Black community was perceived not only as ungrateful, but deserving of derision.

Related is the issue of ethnic voluntary associations. Mutual benefit societies have their origins in the realities of the lack of a welfare system during the periods of mass immigration in this country in the last century. This cross-cultural phenomenon can be seen in the various guilds and unions in urban centers in Africa. Their purposes and accomplishments were admirable, but like most associations whose usefulness is outlived, they have developed significant bureaucracies. These entrenched organizations change their focuses and their mission and become self-preserving, self-perpetuating centers of ethnic isolation.

As another example, Jewish hospitals, charities, and even schools set conditions for personal, personnel, and "care giver/care receiver" conflict. We do not mean to imply that services are denied to others nor that intentional

institutional discriminatory activities take place. It is simply the case that in-group/out-group lines are drawn both within these service organizations themselves and between those inside the organization and those who are on the outside who perceive the organization as isolating and discriminatory and as a consequence behave in a reactionary manner.

Today

Organizations and associations set up by other groups, create similar types of reactions. Often these groups are perceived (partially correctly) as significantly involved in politics. Note the unanimous vote at the 1989 NOW convention for a third party. A likely possibility is that such a party will draw off a sufficient number of votes from mainstream candidates sympathetic to feminist issues and contribute to the election of the more conservative and less sympathetic candidates.

In fact, it is often understood that the whole raison d'etre of these associations is political and that the other activities are "fronts" or means of achieving power in the society. Again, this activity is seen as necessary because of perceived discrimination. These organizations often present themselves not only as representing a "significant" minority, but somehow "delivering" votes, money, and support if whoever or whatever promises to in turn support the particular group. This latter support is expected to be complete and unquestioning. A failure to do is seen as unappreciative and evidence of the system's unwillingness to respond to legitimate concerns of the minority group. The viciousness and vindictiveness of this response often takes the establishment and those who are sympathetic unaware and bewildered.

CONCLUSION

What continues to haunt us is the lack of a complete explanatory structure. When the problem of human and civil rights (an interesting dichotomy, itself) is discussed, the solution often given is more education. But education is not a panacea. Even cross cultural education is not the answer. While some of the research indicates that people who study other cultures have higher tolerance levels on attitudinal tests, we may be dealing with a self-selected sample, i.e., people who study Anthropology are more likely to express tolerant attitudes than people who do not. And, it should be noted, that people who express tolerance do not necessarily behave tolerantly. Can education in anthropology reduce discriminatory behavior? The answer, given the current situation, may not be what we want to hear. But, there is

the possibility that we can do something about it, if we are willing to examine some of the assumptions we say we don't make, but do, in Anthropology; and then make some significant changes in our approach to curriculum and the curriculum itself.

One, we can no longer excuse discriminatory behavior and habits of minority groups because it is part of their culture.

Two, the mind set and idee fixe of western civilization as the most complex (read: highest level of) culture that taints our texts needs to become subject to the same content analysis that we subject documents from other cultures.

Three, we need to de-emphasize the exotic and erotic.

Four, we need to examine what we say and how we say it to make absolutely sure that we are not encouraging xenophobia on one hand and noble savage ideas on the other.

Five, we need to examine the concept of cultural relativity, not only from the perspective of redefining it or changing it, but determining whether covertly it may be a mechanism for maintaining a rationale for prejudice.

Six, we need to examine institutions' impact on individual behavior more critically, particularly creed as the institutionalization of ideology in modern society.

Seven, we need to be up front (and in the front of our textbooks) that we deplore discrimination in any form.